Joint Purchasing Decisions: A Comparison of Influence Structure in Family and Couple Decision-Making Units

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Comparisons of perceived influence structure within household decision-making units of differing composition revealed substantial variations in patterns of role dominance and response consensus. The result also indicated that although children had relatively little perceived influence on the vacation and accommodation selection decisions studied, they may still affect the outcome of particular choices.

The complexity of purchase behavior and dissatisfaction with results obtained from analysis at the level of the individual have created a recent surge of interest in family or joint buying behavior. Such a framework represents a more realistic approach to the study of many consumer decisions, because it explicity recognizes the need to account for the interaction that occurs among family or household members within the processes leading to the purchase of many types of products and services.

The fact that many decisions within the family are joint choice processes has been recognized for some time. This fact is reflected in a continued interest in the literature on family power structures over the past 20 years (Aldous, Hill, Strauss, and Tollman 1971; Blood and Wolfe 1960; Ferber 1971; Sprey 1972; Turk and Bell 1972; Turner 1970). Since 1970, there has been a particularly strong revival of interest in family buying behavior in the consumer research literature. This revival of interest can be traced most directly to a series of writings by Davis (1970; 1971; 1976). These studies made the major contribution of identifying the specific elements of a number of purchase decision processes, and measuring the structure of shared influence between husbands and wives for each of the elements. They also pointed out (Davis 1970; 1971) the methodological problems concerning data reliability and validity when data were obtained from only one spouse, as in numerous market research studies.

Other studies have complemented and extended the work of Davis in specific areas, such as home buying (Hempel 1974; 1975; Munsinger, Weber, and Hansen 1975) financial planning (Ferber and Lee 1974), as well as automobiles and home furnishings (Shuptrine and Samuelson 1976; Woodside 1975). Cunningham and Green (1974) have pointed out that the purchasing roles of husbands and wives have been shifting over the past 25 years. Davis and Rigaux (1974) have examined the structure of husband/wife roles across a series of 25 economic decisions. Other studies (Burns 1977; Burns and Granbois 1977) have pushed our understanding of joint decision making even further by examining the influence of several moderating variables, such as spousal involvement and empathy.

The present study represents an attempt to contribute to this growing body of research on joint purchasing behavior. Specifically, the study provides three additions to previous work.

1. The results indicate how the nature of influence structure in the decision-making process differs across Decision-Making Units (DMUs) of varying composition (Dunsing and Hofstram 1975; Ferber 1975). The DMUs in question were families (husband, wife, and children) and couples (husbands and wives only). The substantive area of interest concerned a series of decisions related to vacation travel and choice of accommodation during this travel (Jenkins 1978).
2. The methodology employed extends earlier work of

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Szybillo and Sosanie (1977) in which measures of influence in choice behavior were modified to include the impact of children. In contrast to the preceding study in which responses were obtained only from wives, the present research obtained estimates of the influence of husbands, wives, and children from both spouses within the DMU.

3. The specific scale used to measure influence structure (100-point constant sum scale) extends the type of analysis possible, and it provides a more appropriate measure for studies involving more complex DMUs for which categorical ratings of dominance become unwieldy.

It should be stressed that the results obtained pertain only to the specific sample used in this study; there is no evidence at this time that the same findings are valid for other groups in the population. There is clearly a need for parallel studies that would permit comparative analysis of the present findings with those from samples of respondents involved in different types of joint purchasing decisions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire administered simultaneously to husband/wife dyads chosen from vacationing families and couples using hotel/motel accommodations during the peak July-August summer holiday season in 1977. Questionnaire administration was effected through personal interviews conducted inside selected hotels/motels to ensure independent completion of the data collection instruments, and to capture the perceptions of respondents while the details concerning the choice of their current accommodation were fresh in their minds.

The method of sampling employed to select respondents involved two stages. In stage one, a representative sample of 12 hotels/motels were drawn from the population of major establishments (three-star rating and up) in Quebec City, Canada. Six of these were chosen randomly from hotels belonging to major chains; the remainder were similarly selected from a list of independently owned establishments. Interviews were then conducted on a rotating basis within each hotel/motel over a six-week period. The second stage of the sampling process involved the selection of respondents within each hotel/motel on a given day. Because hotel managers would not permit guests to be disturbed in their rooms, it was necessary to select and interview respondents in public areas of each establishment.

While attempts were made to interview all appropriate family/couple dyads in a particular hotel/motel on the day in question, this form of convenience sampling contained two possible sources of errors. First, it failed to identify vacationers who either left very early or arrived very late on the day of the interview, or who failed to frequent the interview areas as a couple. Second, although cooperation was generally good, there were a number of refusals to participate in the study, due primarily to perceived time constraints on the part of vacationers. Thus, while efforts were made to obtain inputs that fairly reflected the views of vacationing family/couple dyads, it was not possible to obtain a representative sample or to evaluate the nature and importance of nonresponse error.

Based on the above sampling process, 270 paired interviews were obtained from husband/wife dyads, resulting in a total of 540 separate, completed questionnaires. Given that 700 couples had been approached for interviews, this represented an overall response rate of approximately 39 percent. Of the 270 dyads, 117 involved husbands/wives traveling with their children, and the remaining 153 dyads either had no children or were traveling alone (vacationing couples). Except for minor differences related to the measurement of influence structure within families/couples, the data collection instrument was identical for both categories of respondents.

Completion of the questionnaire required between 25 and 45 minutes and involved responses to five blocks of questions. Block 1 involved background information related to the respondent's visit, as well as a number of behavioral and attitudinal questions on vacation habits and expectations. Block 2 measured the relative importance on a seven-point scale of 31 factors identified as being potentially decisive in the choice of vacation accommodation. Blocks 4 and 5 contained measures of satisfaction concerning the present vacation and sociodemographic classification data.

Block 3 pertained directly to the structure of influence across the overall vacation/accommodation choice decision process and, as such, formed the basis of the present analysis. As shown in the Table, the total decision process was viewed as consisting of 17 subdecisions. Of these, the first ten related to the vacation, and the remaining seven pertained to the accommodation in which the respondent was staying. Influence structure was measured by requesting husbands and wives only to independently estimate the relative influence of the husband, the wife, and the children as a group, across each of the 17 decision elements (the number of children involved was controlled through a subsequent question in Block 5). This estimate of relative influence was obtained by instructing respondents to allocate a total of 100 points (constant sum scale) to each of the members of the DMU (husband/wife/children) in proportion to their perceived importance in determining the outcome of the particular subdecision. Respondents who felt they had virtually no knowledge concerning any given decision element were permitted to indicate this fact. The questionnaires completed by respondents traveling without children obviously made no reference to the influence of this

TABLE

INFLUENCE STRUCTURE IN THE VACATION AND LODGING DECISIONS PROCESS

Subdecision: In what proportion did the husband/wife/children influence your family's decision	Influence as perceived by	Family respondents (n = 234) Influence of (1) Husband (H)	(2) Wife (W)	(3) Children (C)	A Statistical significance of differences in influence of H-W (1–2)	H-C (1–3)	W-C (2–3)	B Statistical significance of differences in perceptions of H-W (4–5)	Couple respondents (n = 306) Influence of (7) Husband (H)	(8) Wife (W)	C Statistical significance of differences in influence of H-W (7–8)	D Statistical significance of differences in perceptions of H-W (4–5)
(1)												
...to take a vacation this year	(4) Husband	42.1	40.8	17.1	0.63	—[a]	—[a]	0.18 (H)	51.6	48.4	0.23	0.79 (H)
	(5) Wife	45.4	35.8	18.8	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.02 (W)	52.1	47.9	0.12	0.80 (W)
	(6) Both	43.7	38.3	18.0	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.49 (C)	51.9	48.1	0.08	—
(2)												
...to take a vacation this summer	(4) Husband	41.7	38.5	19.9	0.27	—[a]	—[a]	0.29 (H)	52.4	47.6	0.07	0.79 (H)
	(5) Wife	44.4	35.6	19.9	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.18 (W)	52.9	47.1	0.02	0.80 (W)
	(6) Both	43.0	37.1	19.9	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.94 (C)	52.6	47.4	0.01	—
(3)												
...concerning exactly when you take this vacation	(4) Husband	59.5	28.4	11.6	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.82 (H)	57.1	43.0	—[a]	0.55 (H)
	(5) Wife	58.8	27.1	14.1	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.19 (W)	61.4	38.6	—[a]	0.38 (W)
	(6) Both	59.2	28.0	12.8	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.36 (C)	60.2	39.8	—[a]	—
(4)												
...concerning the length of this vacation	(4) Husband	61.6	30.2	8.1	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.69 (H)	59.1	40.9	—[a]	0.38 (H)
	(5) Wife	63.0	26.4	10.6	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.19 (W)	61.4	38.6	—[a]	0.38 (W)
	(6) Both	62.3	28.3	9.3	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.30 (C)	60.2	39.8	—[a]	—
(5)												
...concerning the amount of money to be allocated to your vacation budget	(4) Husband	64.0	33.0	2.2	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.57 (H)	65.1	34.9	—[a]	0.26 (H)
	(5) Wife	65.9	31.8	2.4	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.71 (W)	62.1	38.0	—[a]	0.21 (W)
	(6) Both	64.9	32.4	2.3	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.78 (C)	63.6	36.4	—[a]	—
(6)												
...to take this vacation as a family/couple	(4) Husband	45.1	41.8	13.1	0.12	—[a]	—[a]	0.39 (H)	53.7	46.3	—[a]	0.26 (H)
	(5) Wife	44.2	40.5	15.3	0.03	—[a]	—[a]	0.41 (W)	52.8	47.2	—[a]	0.26 (W)
	(6) Both	44.6	41.2	14.2	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.36 (C)	52.2	47.9	—[a]	—
(7)												
...concerning the type of vacation (travel, cottage, etc.) to be taken	(4) Husband	44.0	41.4	14.6	0.37	—[a]	—[a]	0.39 (H)	53.8	46.3	—[a]	0.49 (H)
	(5) Wife	46.0	39.6	24.4	0.02	—[a]	—[a]	0.39 (W)	52.5	47.5	0.03	0.49 (W)
	(6) Both	45.0	40.5	14.5	0.02	—[a]	—[a]	0.88 (C)	53.1	46.9	—[a]	—
(8)												
...to visit the region	(4) Husband	44.5	40.7	14.9	0.32	—[a]	—[a]	0.78 (H)	51.9	49.2	0.79	0.68 (H)
	(5) Wife	45.3	40.2	14.6	0.09	—[a]	—[a]	0.83 (W)	50.8	49.2	0.69	0.68 (W)
	(6) Both	44.9	40.4	14.7	0.06	—[a]	—[a]	0.88 (C)	51.3	48.7	0.30	—
(9)												
...to visit the city	(4) Husband	44.4	41.8	14.3	0.50	—[a]	—[a]	0.53 (H)	51.5	48.5	0.38	0.74 (H)
	(5) Wife	42.6	42.1	15.3	0.87	—[a]	—[a]	0.86 (W)	50.2	49.3	0.69	0.75 (W)
	(6) Both	43.5	41.9	14.8	0.52	—[a]	—[a]	0.73 (C)	51.1	48.9	0.37	—
(10)												
...to stay overnight in city	(4) Husband	46.0	41.6	12.4	0.15	—[a]	—[a]	0.53 (H)	51.4	48.6	0.28	0.92 (H)
	(5) Wife	44.4	39.9	15.7	0.11	—[a]	—[a]	0.47 (W)	51.4	48.6	0.29	0.92 (W)
	(6) Both	45.2	40.8	14.0	0.03	—[a]	—[a]	0.18 (C)	51.4	48.6	0.13	—
(11)												
...as to the type of accommodation for which to look	(4) Husband	44.2	40.6	15.2	0.32	—[a]	—[a]	0.22 (H)	50.6	49.4	0.67	0.86 (H)
	(5) Wife	40.9	41.1	18.0	0.96	—[a]	—[a]	0.83 (W)	50.9	49.1	0.58	0.86 (W)
	(6) Both	42.6	40.9	16.6	0.46	—[a]	—[a]	0.26 (C)	50.7	49.3	0.48	—
(12)												
...to reserve accommodation before arriving in city (if applicable)	(4) Husband	53.5	39.9	4.1	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.76 (H)	54.3	45.8	0.07	0.43 (H)
	(5) Wife	54.8	40.5	4.8	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.86 (W)	51.7	48.3	0.43	0.43 (W)
	(6) Both	55.4	40.2	4.4	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.76 (C)	53.0	47.0	0.05	—

TABLE (*Continued*)

Subdecision: In what proportion did the husband/wife/children influence your family's decision	Influence as perceived by	Family respondents (n = 234) Influence of (1) Husband (H)	(2) Wife (W)	(3) Children (C)	A Statistical significance of differences in influence of H-W (1–2)	H-C (1–3)	W-C (2–3)	B Statistical significance of differences in perceptions of H-W (4–5)	Couple respondents (n = 306) Influence of (7) Husband (H)	(8) Wife (W)	C Statistical significance of differences in influence of H-W (7–8)	D Statistical significance of differences in perceptions of H-W (4–5)
(13)												
...concerning the choice of particular hotel/ motel chain (if applicable)	(4) Husband	49.6	38.3	12.1	0.02	—[a]	—[a]	0.45 (H)	52.8	47.2	0.14	0.83 (H)
	(5) Wife	46.7	40.5	13.0	0.13	—[a]	—[a]	0.51 (W)	52.2	47.8	0.37	0.83 (W)
	(6) Both	48.1	39.5	12.6	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.76 (C)	52.5	47.5	0.10	—
(14)												
...concerning the type of location of hotel/motel (city center versus suburban areas)	(4) Husband	51.3	39.3	9.5	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.42 (H)	51.7	48.3	0.27	0.91 (H)
	(5) Wife	48.8	39.1	12.2	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.91 (W)	51.6	48.4	0.35	0.91 (W)
	(6) Both	50.1	39.2	10.8	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.29 (C)	51.6	48.4	0.13	—
(15)												
...concerning an acceptable price range for accommodation	(4) Husband	61.8	35.3	2.9	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.63 (H)	56.6	43.5	—[a]	0.82 (H)
	(5) Wife	60.4	36.3	3.4	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.71 (W)	57.0	43.0	—[a]	0.82 (W)
	(6) Both	61.1	35.8	3.1	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.70 (C)	56.8	43.2	—[a]	—
(16)												
...concerning the particular hotel/motel in which you are staying	(4) Husband	49.1	39.9	11.0	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]	0.38 (H)	55.0	45.0	0.01	0.89 (H)
	(5) Wife	46.4	48.8	12.8	0.09	—[a]	—[a]	0.74 (W)	54.8	43.2	0.01	0.89 (W)
	(6) Both	47.8	40.3	11.9	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.51 (C)	54.9	45.1	—[a]	—
(17)												
...concerning the choice of your particular hotel room	(4) Husband	47.5	41.1	11.4	0.17	—[a]	—[a]	0.65 (H)	53.8	47.4	0.01	0.53 (H)
	(5) Wife	49.0	39.8	11.2	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.68 (W)	55.4	41.8	—[a]	0.52 (W)
	(6) Both	48.2	40.5	11.3	0.01	—[a]	—[a]	0.89 (C)	54.6	44.6	—[a]	—

[a] Indicates level of significance less than 0.01.

third category. As such, the 100 points were allocated between husband and wife only in these cases.[1]

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Sample

As might be anticipated, family and couple respondents differed by sociodemographic characteristics. The ages of family respondents were highly concentrated (86 percent) in the 31–50 age bracket. In contrast, the ages of couple respondents were distributed in a bimodal manner, 39 percent being under 30 years and 30 percent being over 50 years. Similar patterns were observed for the number of years of marriage. Differences also existed in the structure and level of total household incomes of the two categories of respondents.

Although both categories reported above average incomes, those of family respondents were higher than those of couple respondents. Approximately 50 percent of all family respondents had total annual household incomes in excess of $30,000, whereas the corresponding figures for couple respondents was only 36 percent. This was despite the fact that couple respondents were composed of a higher level of two-income households (70 percent versus 42 percent). Couple respondents had significantly higher levels of formal education as measured by the percentage holding college degrees. This was true for both husbands (63 percent versus 51 percent) and wives (54 percent versus 33 percent).

[1] Prior studies have employed primarily a five-point ordinal scale (subsequently collapsed to three in several instances) measuring the perceptions of influence as "husband only," "husband more than wife," "husband and wife equally," "wife more than husband," and "wife only." Such a scale lends itself well to the study of two component DMUs as in the case of husband/wife studies. However, it becomes unwieldy when a third component (children) is introduced. Although a variety of options are open, such as the rank ordering of relative influence of each component, the 100-point constant sum scale was found to be easily understood by respondents.

Overview of the Analysis

The analysis was designed to compare several aspects of influence structure for family and couple DMUs across the same vacation/accommodation decisions, on the following topics:

- Patterns of husband/wife dominance
- Role structure
- Response consensus
- Stability of influence across the decision process
- Dimensions of decision roles
- Importance of children in the decision process
- Determinants of influence structure.

Dominance within the Decision Process

The objective of this analysis was to examine the extent to which the overall decision process was dominated by particular members of the family/couple DMUs.

Family Respondents. The first step was to test the following hypothesis:

$$I_{H_i} = I_{W_i} = I_{C_i},$$

where I_{H_i}, I_{W_i}, and I_{C_i}, respectively, represent the perceived influence of husbands, wives, and children, across all family respondents; and i represents a given subdecision in the choice process ($i = 1, \ldots 17$).

This hypothesis was initially examined using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in which the dependent variable (influence) was treated as a vector variable (17 subdecisions) having three elements (I_H, I_W, I_C). The analysis found that the overall relationship was significant at the 0.001 level of significance, thus rejecting the null hypothesis of equal influences across husbands, wives, and children. Given that the overall relationship was significant, univariate t tests were then employed to identify the origin of the most important variations in influence. These univariate tests (Table) are useful for descriptive purposes if it is possible to reject the MANOVA null hypothesis (Cooley, Jackson, and Ostrom 1977; Cooley and Lohnes 1971).

Column A of the Table shows that, on the average (perceptions of both husbands and wives), husbands were perceived to exert significantly greater influence than wives or children in 14 of the 17 subdecisions (0.05 level of significance). The male partners viewed themselves as exerting significantly greater influence than their wives on only eight of the subdecisions, with the remaining nine being shared equally. Conversely, the "wife" respondents attributed significantly greater influence to their husbands for 11 of the 17 subdecisions, and viewed the remainder as being equally shared decisions.

In terms of the absolute level of influence perceived by each partner, that of husbands ranged from a high of 65 for the decision related to vacation budget, to a low of 43 for the decision related to the type of accommodation. The greatest influence of wives was perceived in the decision to visit the particular city (42) with the least influence for timing of the vacation (28). Children were accorded relatively little influence on all the subdecisions, although this influence varied from a high of 20 on the decision to take a summer vacation to a low of two on budget.

Couple Respondents. In a parallel manner, the analysis to identify the existence of dominance between husbands and wives across the decision process involved the use of MANOVA to test the hypothesis, $I_{H_i} = I_{W_i}$.

The multivariate analysis revealed significant differences in influence between husbands and wives across the 17 subdecisions ($p < 0.001$). As seen in the Table, based on the evaluations of both spouses, husbands were perceived to be dominant across the decision process, but less so than in the case of families. Specifically, husbands were found to be significantly dominant on nine of the 17 subdecisions. The level of domination was highest for those decisions involving the vacation budget (64), the length of the vacation (60), and the timing of the vacation (58). For the remaining eight subdecisions, husbands and wives did not differ significantly in terms of perceived influence, although there was a tendency toward husband domination of the decisions.

Families Versus Couples. A comparison of the nature of influence dominance across families and couples revealed both similarities and differences. As just noted, family husbands dominated a greater number of the individual subdecisions employed in the study (14 versus nine). Of the 17 subdecisions, family and couple dominance structures were similar for 12 (nine husband dominant and three joint), although differences existed across five subdecisions. For these subdecisions family husbands were dominant, whereas couple husbands were not.[2]

Role Structure

Role structure described the manner in which influence across elements of the decision process is distributed among members of a DMU. *Role specialization* is defined to occur in those situations in which

[2] A further analysis indicated that the observed differences in the patterns of dominance across family and couple DMUs was due to the influence of children rather than the measure employed.

EXHIBIT 1

CLASSIFICATION OF THE FAMILY VACATION/LODGING DECISION PROCESS BY ROLE STRUCTURE

Role structure	Subdecision: Families	Subdecision: Couples
Role sharing		
Syncratic: Shared according to both spouses	Visit the region Visit the city Stay in the city Type of lodging	Take vacation this year Visit the region Visit the city Stay in the city Type of lodging Make reservations Choice of a chain Type of location
Autonomic: Shared according to husband/dominated (by husband) according to wife	Take vacation this year Take vacation this summer Take vacation together Type of vacation Choice of room	Take vacation this summer
Dominated (by husband) according to husband/shared according to wife	Choice of a chain Choice of a hotel	
Role specialization		
Dominated (by husband) according to both spouses	Timing of vacation Length of vacation Budget for vacation Make reservations Type of location Acceptable price range	Timing of vacation Length of vacation Budget for vacation Take vacation together Type of vacation Acceptable price range Choice of hotel Choice of room

either the husband or wife has a dominant influence on a particular subdecision. *Role sharing* describes situations in which husband and wives have approximately equal influence on a given subdecision. Davis and Rigaux (1974) have further broken down role sharing situations into syncratic (consensus between husbands and wives) and autonomic (lack of husband/wife consensus).

The analysis of role structure revealed substantial differences between family and couple DMUs (Exhibit 1). Eight couple subdecisions were classified as syncratic as opposed to four in the case of families. In contrast, seven decisions were categorized as autonomic for families versus only one for couple respondents. Role specialization existed to approximately the same extent for both families and couples.

The overall picture that emerges is one in which more shared decision making is acknowledged among couples traveling alone than among those traveling with children. In both cases, shared decision making was observed primarily for those decisions involving the actual vacation destination, whereas husband dominance was related to those decisions concerning budget levels, timing, and specific characteristics of lodging.

Response Consensus

The foregoing results have been primarily on the *average* perceptions of husbands and wives taken together. The questions now addressed concern:

1. the extent to which husbands and wives agree on the influence of each partner; and
2. whether response congruence patterns differ between family and couple decision-making situations.

Husband and wife agreement may be analyzed in different ways. The traditional approach has been to compare the responses from husbands' and wives' classifications of decisions (based on a three-category scale: husband dominant, joint, and wife dominant) to determine the percentage of decisions that are classified in the same way by each partner. The drawback to this approach is that any decision to classify a subdecision as being generally "congruent" or "noncongruent" is difficult and arbitrary, e.g., what percentage of noncongruent responses are necessary to classify a subdecision as generally noncongruent?

In this study, responses pertaining to a given subdecision were classified as congruent/noncongruent depending on whether or not a comparison of husbands' and wives' responses revealed statistically significant differences. Because both spouses provided estimates of the perceived influence of every member of the DMU, it was possible (for family respondents) to compare the mean influence accorded by each spouse to the response categories of "husband," "wife," and "children." Stated formally, this analysis involved a test of the following hypothesis:

$$I_{M_H} = I_{M_W},$$

where I_{M_H} represents the influence accorded to a given member (M) of the DMU (husband or wife or children) by husband respondents, and I_{M_w} represents the influence accorded to a given member of the DMU ($M = H$, W, or C) by wife respondents.

As shown in Column B of the Table, the difference in perceptions of husbands and wives (H-W) for each of three response categories was statistically significant (0.05 level) for only one of the 51 comparisons across the 17 subdecisions (three response categories × 17 subdecisions). Similarly, in the case of couple DMUs, no statistically significant differences were found between the perceptions of spouses' ratings of

EXHIBIT 2

PATTERNS OF RESPONSE CONGRUENCE FOR PERCEIVED INFLUENCE IN THE VACATION AND LODGING DECISION AGGREGATE LEVEL OF ANALYSIS[a]

	Respondent group					
	Families (n = 234)		Congruence (C) or non-congruence	Couples (n = 306)		Congruence (C) or non-congruence
Subdecision	*H*	*W*	(NC)	*H*	*W*	(NC)
1	JT	HD	NC	JT	JT	C
2	JT	HD	NC	JT	JT	C
3	HD	HD	C	HD	HD	C
4	HD	HD	C	HD	HD	C
5	HD	HD	C	HD	HD	C
6	JT	HD	NC	HD	HD	C
7	JT	HD	NC	HD	HD	C
8	JT	JT	C	JT	JT	C
9	JT	JT	C	JT	JT	C
10	JT	JT	C	JT	JT	C
11	JT	JT	C	JT	JT	C
12	HD	HD	C	JT	JT	C
13	JT	HD	NC	JT	JT	C
14	HD	HD	C	JT	JT	C
15	HD	HD	C	HD	HD	C
16	JT	HD	NC	HD	HD	C
17	JT	HD	NC	HD	HD	C

[a] Congruence is based on 0.05 level of significance (see Table, Column A).
NOTE: JT = perceived as joint decision. HD = perceived as husband-dominated decision.

husband or wife influence across the 17 subdecisions (Column D). As such, this form of analysis provided strong support for several previous studies that found high levels of consensus in husband/wife responses at the aggregate level of analysis.

The structure of the data provided a second way in which spousal responses might be classified as congruent or noncongruent. For example, based on a comparison of relative husband/wife influence (Table, Column A), subdecision 1 was judged to be a "joint" decision by family husbands, whereas family wives judged it to be "husband dominant." Thus, this subdecision was categorized as being "noncongruent." In contrast, subdecision 3 was classified as "congruent" because both husbands and wives (family/couple) considered it to be "husband dominant." Similarly, subdecision 9 was also classified as congruent because both categories of family respondents viewed it as a "joint" decision. Exhibit 2, derived in this manner from the Table, summarizes the overall patterns of response congruence for all subdecisions for both family and couple respondents at the aggregate level of analysis. As shown, the responses of family husbands and wives were found to be congruent for ten of the 17 vacation/lodging decisions at the 0.05 level of significance. In the case of couples, all decisions were categorized as congruent at the 0.05 level of significance.

In all cases of noncongruency for family responses, the source of role disagreement was found to derive from "modesty" (Davis and Rigaux 1974) or "concession" (Burns 1977) on the part of the husband. Husbands viewed their influence as being of less importance than did the wives; that is, whereas wives perceived the noncongruent decisions as "husband dominated," the husbands rated them as "joint decisions."[3]

Stability of Influence

As in previous studies, it was found that influence was not a generalized phenomenon, but rather that it varied with the element of the decision process under consideration. A one-way analysis of variance showed that significant differences existed in the mean influence of each respondent group (husbands, wives, children) across the 17 subdecisions for both family and couple DMUs.

A comparison of influence stability across the decision process for each of the DMU types revealed substantially greater variability of influence among families than among couples. For example, the range of difference in influence for family husbands was 23 compared to 13 for couple husbands. In the case of both families and couples, the maximum difference in influence between husbands and wives occurred for the subdecision on the budget to be allocated to the vacation. In part, the greater range of difference in influence in family DMUs derives from the presence of children. When the relative influences of family husbands and wives were recalculated (on a base of 100), excluding children, the maximum difference dropped to 16. In general, it was observed that the influence exerted by children tended to come at the expense of the wife rather than the husband, i.e., on a constant sum scale of 100, the influence of family husbands diminished less than did that of wives when children were present.

Dimensions of Decision Roles

The issue addressed in this section concerns the similarity in influence patterns among the 17 different sub-

[3] A comparison of the findings from the two approaches for examining role consensus shows some disagreement due to the manner in which congruence was defined, the manner in which the question was asked in the study, and how the results were interpreted. As can be seen from the Table, those decisions for family respondents that were categorized as noncongruent in Exhibit 2 are so classified based solely on a comparison of husband-wife perceptions of their respective influence. However, when the perceptions of husband-children and wife-children influence are examined, it is seen that perceptions of husbands and wives are highly congruent. Thus, the classification of certain decisions as noncongruent is conditional, providing an explanation of the different conclusions reached via the alternative analytical procedure. It is important to note, however, that it is the classification approach employed to develop Exhibit 2 that is most commonly used to report findings of this type.

EXHIBIT 3

DIMENSIONS OF THE DECISION PROCESS FOR FAMILY AND COUPLE RESPONDENTS

	Dimension				
Unit	General vacation decision	Specific vacation decision	Amount to spend	Vacation destination	Characteristics of accommodation
Family respondents	Decision to take a vacation this year (.85)	Decision concerning exactly when to take the vacation (.71)	Decision concerning amount of money to be allocated to vacation budget (.86)	Decision to visit a specific region (.85)	Decision as to type of accommodation (.75)
	Decision to take a vacation this summer (.83)	Decision concerning the length of vacation (.75)	Decision concerning an acceptable price (.55)	Decision to visit specific city (.92)	Decision to reserve accommodation before arriving (.72)
				Decision to stay overnight in specific city (.81)	Decision concerning choice of a particular hotel/motel chain (.79)
				Decision to take vacation as a family (.41)	Decision concerning type of location (.72)
				Decision concerning type of vacation (.50)	Decision concerning particular hotel/motel (.80)
					Decision concerning particular room (.59)
Couple respondents	Decision to take vacation this year (.60)	—	Decision concerning amount of money to be allocated to vacation budget (.58)	Decision to visit a specific region (.87)	Decision as to type of accommodation (.75)
	Decision to take a vacation this summer (.58)	—	Decision concerning acceptable price range (.47)	Decision to visit a specific city (.87)	Decision to reserve accommodation before arriving (.72)
	Decision concerning exactly when to take the vacation (.59)	—		Decision to stay overnight in a specific city (.60)	Decision concerning choice of a particular hotel/motel chain (.79)
	Decision concerning length of vacation (.62)	—			Decision concerning type of location (.72)
					Decision concerning particular hotel/motel (.80)
					Decision concerning particular room (.59)
					Decision to take vacation as a family (.48)
					Decision concerning type of vacation (.49)

NOTE: Values in parentheses indicate factor loadings.

decisions; that is, can major dimensions of the decision process be empirically derived from an analysis of individual subdecisions? As a corollary, are there differences in the dimensions of decision roles across family and couple DMUs?

Factor analysis of the influence scores for a given DMU member on each of the 17 subdecisions was the primary method used to identify decision role dimensions. The specific approach was a principal-component analysis with a varimax rotation of the final solution. As shown in Exhibit 3, five dimensions (eigenvalues > 1.0) explaining more than 75 percent of variance were interpretable. For couple respondents only four dimensions, explaining 69 percent of total variance, had eigenvalues exceeding 1.0.

Two items in particular should be noted. First, couples had fewer dimensions than family respondents because the first four elements of the decision process were correlated with one dimension for couples, whereas for families these elements were split to form

two different dimensions. Second, two subdecisions (take vacation as family/couple and type of vacation) were correlated with different dimensions in the case of family and couple respondents. In both instances, the factor loadings for these subdecisions were only moderate. In all cases, the factor structures were stable across separate analyses in which the sample was split in two and the results compared.

Importance of Children

The results of this study indicate that for vacation and lodging decisions, ignoring children would appear to have very little impact from a practical standpoint. It would seem premature, however, to dismiss the need to include measures of the influence of children in future studies, because the results raise several issues. First, although child influence was never high in absolute terms, its importance did vary greatly (20 versus 2) for different subdecisions. This finding, plus the fact that both spouses agreed on the absolute level of child influence, indicates that children do have a real, although low, impact on these types of decisions.

Despite this low level of influence, the analysis (Table) identified 11 (of 17) subdecisions for which neither spouse was perceived to exert a "majority" influence (i.e., greater than 50 percent). This finding implies that, for these decisions, children have the potential to determine the outcome, assuming that children act as a unit where more than one child is in the DMU.

Determinants of Influence Structure

Although not an original goal of the present study, analysis was also carried out to determine if the level of influence of a DMU member could be explained from the limited set of socioeconomic variables that were available. The underlying objective of this analysis was to assess whether the observed differences in influence structure between the two DMU types appeared to be due to the presence of children or to other characteristics of the sample.

To make this assessment, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted for each subdecision in which the influence of one member of the DMU was the dependent variable. Independent variables included the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents (age, income, education, and number of years of marriage) as well as a dummy variable for the presence of children. Only two variables demonstrated a significantly and generally consistent relationship to influence level across the 17 subdecisions. These were the dummy variables indicating the presence or absence of children within the DMU and the annual income of the husband. In general, the family/couple variable appeared to better explain the first ten subdecisions concerning the vacation itself, whereas husband's income was more highly related to decisions involving the choice of accommodation. Exceptions to this generalization were the relation of husband's income to vacation budget and timing decisions, and the relation of DMU composition to choice of type of accommodation and selection of a particular hotel.

It should be stressed that the multiple R^2 values were generally of the order of 0.10, although certain equations explained as much as 15 percent of the total variance. These values approach those from other research (Jenkins 1979) where efforts were made to predict influence structure in a more concerted manner, using a more complete set of socioeconomic variables. Finally, as has been pointed out, the inability of socioeconomic variables to explain a substantial percentage of variance at the level of individuals does not necessarily imply that there are not substantial differences across different socioeconomic groups (Bass, Tigert, and Lonsdale 1968). In the present case, influence structure was found to differ between family and couple DMUs at the aggregrate level, even though multiple regression analysis failed to explain an important percentage of variation at the level of individual DMUs.

CONCLUSIONS

To date, no studies have compared the manner in which influence structure within the same decision process varies among household DMUs of different composition. The present study addresses this issue by comparing influence structure for two types of household DMU (family versus couple) across identical decision processes.

Four main conclusions result:

1. Husbands tended to dominate decision making more in family DMUs than in those where no children were present; joint decision making was more prevalent in couple DMUs.
2. Response consensus appeared higher in couple DMUs than in family DMUs.
3. The relative influence of husbands and wives across different elements of the decision process varied to a greater extent in family DMUs than it did in couple DMUs.
4. Within family DMUs, children exerted relatively little influence on the overall decision process, though the extent of their influence varied substantially across different elements of the decision process. Nevertheless, children may have the potential to influence family decisions by forming alliances with either the husband or wife to produce a "majority" position.

In overall terms, the results of this research suggest that the study of influence structure in household decision making should be refined to recognize differences among DMUs of varying composition. Although

it must be emphasized that the results pertain only to a special group of respondents and a specific decision process, they strongly indicate the need for additional work to examine a number of methodological and practical questions. These include: the extent to which measures of influence attributed to husbands and wives are affected by the size of the DMU; the nature of influence structure in households having DMU compositions different from those in this study; and the manner in which household decision making involving different types of DMUs is affected by the product/service category being purchased.

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